

N E W S R E L E A S E

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24th ANNUAL MEDIA ACCESS AWARDS HONORS HOLLYWOOD *Celebrating Inclusion of Disability in the Media and Entertainment Industries*

UNIVERSAL CITY – Hollywood entertainers helped celebrate the 24th Annual Media Access Awards Sunday night at a ceremony at Universal Studios' Globe Theatre. The Media Access Awards are presented by the California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities to honor individuals, productions, and companies who accurately portray persons with disabilities in the entertainment industry while increasing employment opportunities for those same professionals. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had prepared a video-taped message to address the audience.

"I congratulate all of tonight's honorees for their fantastic work," said Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. "Your work is all about giving chances and shining the spotlight on what people with disabilities can do, not what they can't do. By using the unbelievable power of the media and entertainment industries, you give accurate portrayals of people with disabilities, expanding public awareness, acceptance, and employment opportunities for everyone."

The awards presented included the Governor's Award of Excellence, which recognizes an outstanding contribution of state or nationwide impact in promoting awareness and dignity for people with disabilities. It was presented by Labor and Workforce Development Agency Secretary Victoria Bradshaw to Actor **Michael J. Fox** for his support of Parkinson's research, and for utilizing his notoriety to help raise public awareness and understanding about Parkinson's disease.

Recording artist **Jose Feliciano** and actor **Robert David Hall** of TV's CSI were each honored with an American Federation of Television and Radio Artist's (AFTRA) Disability Awareness Award. The recognition was given for their significant contributions in raising the visibility and awareness of disability issues in the broadcast, sound recording and entertainment industries.

The Screen Actors Guild gave the Harold Russell Award to Actress **Deanne Bray** for her significant contributions to public awareness and understanding of people with disabilities through media. Bray is a deaf actress who portrays an undercover surveillant for the FBI on PAX TV's "Sue Thomas: F.B.EYE".

Fern Orenstein Vice President of Casting for CBS received the Casting Society of America Award for consistently casting roles based on ability, not disability, and for her efforts to include characters cast in typical roles with no reference to their disability.

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Other honorees included writer **Katharyn Powers**, the recipient of the Writers Guild of America Joan Young Award for her commitment to increasing access for all writers with disabilities in the entertainment industry. Over the past 30 years, Ms. Powers exhibited extraordinary persistence in meeting societal challenges while living with her own disability and pursuing a successful writing career.

Several movies and television programs and their producers also were honored for their inclusion and accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities. They include award-winning films **'The Devil and Daniel Johnston'**, **'39 Pounds of Love'**, **'Emmanuel's Gift'**, and **'The Family Stone'**.

Two HBO documentaries, **'I Have Tourettes But Tourettes Doesn't Have Me'** and **'Yellow Brick Road'** received outstanding television program awards. Other television awards included: The Learning Channel's **'Little People Big World'**, FX Channel's **'Nip/Tuck'**, and NBC's **'Last Comic Standing: Josh Blue'**, **'My Name is Earl'**, and **'The Office'**.

Special recognition awards were presented to Fox Searchlight Pictures for its role in the production of the movie **'The Ringer'** whose cast included 150 current and former Special Olympians, and to Ford Motor Company for its **'Bold Moves'** campaign which features captivating scenes of people in everyday life making bold moves to overcome obstacles.

Presenters for the evening included celebrities CSI's **Robert David Hall** and **Jorga Fox**, Comedienne **Kathy Buckley**, My Name is Earl's **Tracy Ashton**, Vegas's **Grant Albrecht**, Boston Legal's **Meredith Eaton-Gilden**, and **Michael Gilden**, Eve's **Jason George**, **Joey Travolta**, **Danny Woodburn**, and many others.

Despite the fact that different surveys vary greatly due to how disability is defined, there is an identified employment gap between people with and without disabilities. According to the 2005 Cornell University Disability Status Report the California employment rate of working-age people with a disability was 37.4 percent in comparison to the employment rate of working-age people without a disability at 75.7 percent.

A Screen Actors Guild report released in May of 2005 on the Employment of Performers with Disabilities in the Entertainment Industry stated that less than 2 percent of TV show characters display a disability and only 0.5 percent have speaking roles.

The Media Access Awards were established in 1979 by the California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and producer Fern Field and her late husband Norman Brooks to recognize and encourage the accurate portrayal of people with disabilities. The Media Access Awards seek to increase the inclusion of disability in what we see and hear, and to raise public awareness, understanding and acceptance.

Entertainment and media industry professionals, working with the Governor's Committee, established the Media Access Office in 1980, which provides casting services, classes and workshops that build competitive skills and offer career guidance to persons with disabilities.

The Media Access Office is a unique partnership of volunteers and staff of the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and the California Employment Development Department.

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